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ABSTRACT

A prevocational/vocational training program for mentally retarded adults who also have emotional disturbances expanded its curriculum to incorporate self-help, social/affective, communication, community life, and vocational skills. Residents are trained in a variety of work options: bench work task, horticultural tasks, janitorial skills, basic skills (such as tool use, sewing, and food preparation), subcontract work (which emphasizes work skills, quality control, and social/affective behaviors expected in the work setting), and leisure skills. A new evaluation system is tied to the prevocational/vocational curriculum and specifies criteria for entrance into the advanced vocational program. (CL)

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A VOCATIONAL PROGRAM AND SKILL ASSESSMENT FOR SEVERE/PROFOUND MENTALLY RETARDED AND EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED RETARDED ADULTS

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Arlington Developmental Center

Description of targeted population surveyed:

Residents of a facility such as Arlington Developmental Center (ADC) have a primary diagnosis of mental retardation. As in normal populations, MR populations are susceptible to a full range of personality disturbances. However, the presence of mental retardation decreases the diagnostic significance of abnormal behavior that is considered indicative of an emotional or psychological disorder and few residents have an actual dual diagnosis. In mentally retarded populations, emotional disorders are generally considered to be a consequence of intellectual deficiencies (Reiss, Levitan, Syzxxko, 1982) while in normal populations such disorders are not considered a function of intelligence. In a survey conducted at ADC of 234 residents, 49 were identified as exhibiting behaviors indicative of emotional disorders (20%). Only 34 residents have an actual dual diagnosis (14½%).

For the purposes of this paper, criteria for establishing the existence of an emotional disturbance were dual diagnosis, the need for psychotropic drugs to control violent or self abusive behavior, the presence of 2 or more autistic behaviors engaged in more than 50% of the time, and severe and chronic self abuse. Table II further breaks down the emotional disturbances into classes surveyed. **(Table not included in this paper.)**

Of the 49 residents identified in the target population, 20 are not eligible for vocational placement because they are of school age (13), below entry level functioning and/or exhibit behavior disturbances (7) of a severity to interfere with vocational training.

The remaining 29 emotionally disturbed residents function primarily in the top third of vocational ability and have a recognized need for further training in vocational areas. They are trained in sequentially developed work related vocational skills within the facility and off campus, where appropriate, to promote development that can lead tc remunerative employment in group home placements and sheltered occupational settings.

The need for new evaluation measure for a changing program:

The program at ADC serves the severely and profoundly mentally retarded including those individuals who are emotionally disturbed. The training requirements, for successful work

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adjustment, are quite varied and broad in scope. It was felt there was a need to expand the curriculum to more fully address social skills, survival, self-care and community life skills to better prepare a resident to cope with higher level vocational programs and actual employment situations.

The previous vocational training program consisted of levels 1,2,3 and 4 with individualized training provided for 45 minutes for each resident at levels 1 and 2. Levels 1 and 2 were prevocational. There was little movement between levels and those who did not advance created a bottleneck for those who were waiting to enter the program. Individualized instruction, while providing an excellent student/teacher ratio, permitted a limited enrollment with many in need of training waiting to enter. Enrollment was based primarily on available space rather than on vocational aptitude. The present program consists of Work Activity (prevocational), Advanced levels and Vocational Academics, utilizing a small group training format of 4 - 6 residents at entry level and 8 - 10 in advanced levels.

In addition, the curriculum was expanded to address self-help, social/affective, communication, community life as well as vocational domains. Those residents who have reached their maximum performance at a low vocational level may remain on that plane while others, who evidence greater vocational aptitude, move into the program and are channeled, after initial training, into Advanced Vocational and, in some cases, continue on to community placement.

Curriculum objectives:

The Prevocational/Vocational Training Program is committed to the development of the whole individual through exposing residents to the world of work; assisting in the development of good work habits and positive attitudes toward work; helping in the development of some degree of self sufficiency and, above all, helping to develop a sense of self worth.

Bench work tasks develop fine and gross motor coordination through simple tasks such as: stringing beads, pegboards, stacking blocks and form matching. The program exposes residents to a simulated workshop situation in order to help them increase work skills.

Horticultural training acquaints residents with daily care of potted plants and methods of propagation, gardening and harvesting.

Residents are trained in janitorial skills. They cooperate in working with peers and staff. Training emphasizes reduced staff intervention, increasing work stamina, developing appropriate work-related behaviors.

Subcontract work develops work skills, quality control concepts, and social affective behaviors expected in a sheltered work environment, and increases on task time and work endurance.

The area of Practical Life introduces residents to basic simple hand tools and their use, sewing for simple mending and elementary food preparation.

The major emphasis in the Work Related domain of vocational training is in social skills. Training includes attending to work task, working independently and cooperatively with others and following instructions. Survival skills are taught. Residents must learn to respond appropriately to a fire alarm and use safe procedures with tools. Other survival skills include use of money and basic time concepts. Developing independence in toileting and in travelling to and from the work area enables a resident to function more appropriately both within the residential setting and in the community.

Training in the Leisure Skills domain leads to more appropriate and constructive use of free time. Such activities might be participation in team sports, rug hooking, playing simple board games and dancing and working jigsaw puzzles.

The new evaluation program:

A new evaluation program was needed to estimate vocational aptitude and individual progress through the expanded curriculum. This evaluation consists of the initial (and annual) screening instrument, testing materials and the curriculum checklist. All residents are now screened for evaluation of vocational status at the annual programmatic staffing, regardless of age, and appropriate recommendations are made. In the event of referrals, additional evaluations are made and the Interdisciplinary Team is informed of the results. This system enables staff to make programmatic decisions regarding training to prepare residents for future entry into the vocational program and serves as a valuable resource to academic teaching staff. For those residents presently served by the program, vocational evaluation is based on daily training data, monthly progress notes, quarterly reports, formal and informal observation, and the curriculum checklist used to chart all attainments resulting from formal criterion based goal plans and informal activity work. The evaluation program developed consists of:

-evaluation packets to ascertain entry level skills for prevocational and vocational levels. They are used to assess skills annually for each resident.

-a brochure explaining scoring and a materials list are included.

-a curriculum outline serves as a guide for the program staff.

In the initial assessment, the Vocational Work Activity Program probes for physical evidence of sufficient eye/hand coordination and bilateral use of hands for manipulation of work materials, a well developed palmar and pincer grasp, the ability to grasp and release materials on command, enough gross motor development to permit trunk control, and strength to move work materials about. A potential student must demonstrate the capacity to reproduce a demonstration, beginning discrimination skills, endurance to functionally withstand thirty minutes of work on a variety of tasks, sufficient attention to a given task to attend to work for ten minutes with a minimum of prompting, and the ability to remain at the work station for twenty minutes. A resident must be able to understand and follow a simple one step command with minimum prompting and have the ability to make basic needs known through gestures, sign language, Bliss symbols or verbal language. In addition, a resident must be willing to comply to a request within 60 seconds and neither display nor engage in disruptive or self-stimulative behaviors more than ten percent (10%) of the time.

To enter the Advanced Vocational Program, a resident must demonstrate fully developed eye/hand coordination, grasping (palmar/pincer), reaching and releasing skills, bilateral use of hands and gross motor control. In addition, the student should demonstrate vocational skills in packaging, assembly, disassembly and collating. The resident must display well developed discrimination and imitating capabilities, and the capacity to functionally withstand three to six hours of work, attending to work independently for one hour, and remaining at the work station for 90 minutes. The resident must be able to make basic needs known without assistance, respond to name when called and follow simple two step commands. The student should be willing to comply to requests within ten seconds and work cooperatively with a group of five or more with some supervision. Disruptive or self-stimulative behavior must not occur more than five percent (5%) of the time.

The characteristics assessed in the evaluation instruments were judged by consensus of departmental staff to be essential prerequisites for successful training in vocational areas. The program provides sequentially developed skill training that leads to competitive or semi-competitive employment. Residents are trained to develop good work habits and a positive attitude toward work. Other program aims include developing a degree of independence in personal care and self-sufficiency in work skills.

The new evaluation program is itself undergoing an assessment period. During this time its validity, efficiency and accuracy in projecting vocational aptitude are being judged and norms established.

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